



Aruba enjoyed a beautiful Lighting Parade for Carnaval 69 Page 11



Aruba's Tourism Association introducing AHATA Impact Award Page 7

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Camping season 2023 announced

Page 8

11 states consider 'right to repair' for farming equipment

By JESSE BEDAYN
Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — On Colorado's northeastern plains, where the pencil-straight horizon divides golden fields and blue sky, a farmer named Danny Wood scrambles to plant and harvest proso millet, dryland corn and winter wheat in short, seasonal windows. That is until his high-tech Steiger 370 tractor conks out. The tractor's manufacturer doesn't allow Wood to make certain fixes himself, and last spring his fertilizing operations were stalled for three days before the servicer arrived to add a few lines of missing computer code for \$950. "That's where they have us over the barrel, it's more like we are renting it than buying it," said Wood, who spent \$300,000 on the used tractor.



Continued on Page 2 In this photo provided by Danny Wood is his tractor, sitting at his farm in northeastern Colorado in May 2022.

Associated Press

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11 states consider 'right to repair' for farming equipment

Continued from Front

Wood's plight, echoed by farmers across the country, has pushed lawmakers in Colorado and 10 other states to introduce bills that would force manufacturers to provide the tools, software, parts and manuals needed for farmers to do their own repairs — thereby avoiding steep labor costs and delays that imperil profits.

"The manufacturers and the dealers have a monopoly on that repair market because it's lucrative," said Rep. Brianna Titone, a Democrat and one of the bill's sponsors. "(Farmers) just want to get their machine going again."

In Colorado, the legislation is largely being pushed by Democrats while their Republican colleagues find themselves stuck in a tough spot: torn between right-leaning farming constituents asking to be able to repair their own machines and the manufacturing businesses that oppose the idea.

The manufacturers argue that changing the current practice with this type of legislation would force companies to expose trade secrets. They also say it would make it easier for farmers to tinker with the software and illegally crank up the horsepower



In this photo provided by Danny Wood, a combine harvests grain on his farm in northeastern Colorado in July 2022.

and bypass the emissions controller — risking operators' safety and the environment.

Similar arguments around intellectual property have been leveled against the broader campaign called 'right to repair,' which has picked up steam across the country — crusading for the right to fix everything from iPhones to hospital ventilators during the pandemic. In 2011, Congress passed a law ensuring that car owners and independent mechanics — not just authorized dealerships — had access to the necessary

tools and information to fix problems.

Ten years later, the Federal Trade Commission pledged to beef up its right to repair enforcement at the direction of President Joe Biden. And just last year, Titone sponsored and passed Colorado's first right to repair law, empowering people who use wheelchairs with the tools and information to fix them.

For the right to repair farm equipment — from thin tractors used between grape vines to behemoth combines for harvesting grain that can cost over

half a million dollars — Colorado is joined by 10 states including Florida, Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, Texas and Vermont.

Many of the bills are finding bipartisan support, said Nathan Proctor, who leads Public Interest Research Group's national right to repair campaign. But in Colorado's House committee on agriculture, Democrats pushed the bill forward in a 9-4 vote along party lines, with Republicans in opposition even though the bill's second sponsor is Republican Rep. Ron Weinberg.

"That's really surprising, and

that upset me," said the Republican Wood.

Wood's tractor, which flies an American flag reading "Farmers First," isn't his only machine to break down. His grain harvesting combine was dropping into idle, but the servicer took five days to arrive on Wood's farm — a setback that could mean a hail storm decimates a wheat field or the soil temperature moves beyond the Goldilocks zone for planting.

"Our crop is ready to harvest and we can't wait five days, but there was nothing else to do," said Wood. "When it's broke down you just sit there and wait and that's not acceptable. You can be losing \$85,000 a day."

Rep. Richard Holtorf, the Republican who represents Wood's district and is a farmer himself, said he's being pulled between his constituents and the dealerships in his district covering the largely rural northeast corner of the state. He voted against the measure because he believes it will financially impact local dealerships in rural areas and could jeopardize trade secrets.

"I do sympathize with my farmers," said Holtorf, but he added, "I don't think it's the role of government to be forcing the sale of their intellectual property." □



Wild blueberries are ready for harvesting July 27, 2012, in Warren, Maine.

Associated Press

By **PATRICK WHITTLE**
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The wild blueberry, Maine's most important fruit, could

get some help fighting off a pest under legislation proposed by the state's Republican U.S. senator. Maine is the only state in

Maine blueberries vs. fly: U.S. senator files bill to help

the country with a significant harvest of wild blueberries, which are smaller cousins to the more ubiquitous cultivated berries. The wild blueberry, which grows in the sprawling barrens of Maine's rural east, is the state's official berry and one of its most significant exports.

The berries are threatened by the spotted wing drosophila, a fruit fly from East Asia first detected in the United States in 2008. The fly was first located in Maine in 2011. U.S. Sen. Susan Collins said Monday that she

has submitted a bill to establish a fund of \$6.5 million per year for five years to advance research and reduce the fly's population. "Maine's wild blueberries are an integral part of our state's heritage and play a major role in our state's economy," Collins said. "The pervasiveness of the spotted wing drosophila has threatened the livelihoods of fruit farmers across the country."

The fly lays eggs in fruit crops such as blueberries and raspberries. It causes more than \$700 million in estimated

economic loss per year nationwide, Collins said. The fly has also caused increased use of insecticide in fruit crops, she said. The Collins proposal comes as Maine's wild blueberry crop has recently experienced improvement after a few years of downturn. Farmers harvested more than 100 million pounds (45 million kilograms) of the berries in 2021 after falling short of that number for four years in a row. The crop was also worth more per pound in 2021 than it had been in years, state records show. □

Biden fires Architect of the Capitol over alleged abuses

By **LISA MASCARO** and
COLLEEN LONG

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has fired the embattled Architect of the Capitol, Brett Blanton, following a scathing inspector general report on his personal and professional management and calls for his removal.

The White House said Monday that Blanton's appointment was terminated. It comes as House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said Monday he'd lost confidence in Blanton's ability to do the job. An inspector general report released last year found "administrative, ethical and policy violations" by Blanton, a Trump-era appointee, including that he abused his government vehicle and misrepresented himself as a law enforcement official. A House hearing last week unearthed new questions and criticisms including that he was not at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, when it came under attack by former President Donald Trump's supporters.

"The Architect of the Capitol, Brett Blanton, no longer has my confidence to continue in his job. He should resign or President Biden



J. Brett Blanton, Architect of the Capitol, speaks during the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, on the West Front of the Capitol in Washington.

Associated Press

should remove him immediately," McCarthy said Monday in a tweet.

The speaker's statement came as questions and criticism swirled around the architect, who is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the historic Capitol building and its surrounding complex and grounds.

Blanton has come under intense criticism after the inspector general report found Blanton allowed un-

authorized use of his work vehicle, including by his wife and adult daughter, racking up nearly 30,000 miles about triple the estimate for his official use.

Blanton also came under fire when he testified that he was not at the Capitol during the Jan. 6, 2021 attack because it was a "telework" day under COVID-19 protocols.

He also faced fierce questions about Capitol tours he allowed and sometimes

conducted despite pandemic restrictions. An investigation launched after a hotline tip about unauthorized use of his work vehicle drew attention to his office. On Monday, the chairman of the House Administration Committee, Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Wis., also called on Blanton to immediately resign.

"The Inspector General's report was highly concerning," Steil said. He said at last week's hearing, Blan-

ton's "refusal to be transparent and truthful has made clear that he can no longer lead the organization and must resign immediately. I look forward to continuing to conduct robust oversight to ensure our government is accountable to the American people."

The Office of the Inspector General report issued in October 2022 found that Blanton had "Abused His Authority, Misused Government Property and Wasted Taxpayer Money, Among Other Substantiated Violations." The inspector general said it received a hotline complaint on March 7, 2021, "concerning the misuse" of an AOC (Architect of the Capitol) vehicle.

It said the black Ford Explorer near the Walmart at Tyson's Corner was driving "extremely reckless in the parking garage and swerving out of the garage at a high rate of speed, estimated to be about 65 miles per hour (mph) in a 30-mph zone."

The complainant said the driver, a woman later identified to be Blanton's adult daughter, "made obscene gestures toward them while at the stop sign outside the parking garage." □

Antisemitism worries rising for many U.S. Jews, survey finds

By The Associated Press

More than four in ten Jews in the United States feel their status in America is less secure than it was a year earlier, according to a new survey by the American Jewish Committee.

The survey, conducted in the fall of 2022, was released Monday by the AJC, a prominent Jewish advocacy organization. The survey was taken in a year of high-profile incidents of antisemitism, including a hostage-taking at a Texas synagogue and anti-Jewish statements shared by celebrities on social media. Former President Donald Trump dined with two openly antisemitic guests, drawing criticism from his own Jewish sup-

porters.

According to the AJC survey, 41% of the respondents said the status of Jews in the U.S. is less secure than it was the year before, while 55% said it was the same. Only 4% thought it was more secure.

The results show anxieties increasing since a comparable survey in 2021, when 31% of respondents thought their status was less secure than a year earlier. Four in five Jews said in the 2022 survey that antisemitism has grown in the past five years; nearly half said it's taken less seriously than other forms of bigotry or hate.

A quarter of the respondents said they were directly targeted by antise-

mitic expressions, either in person or on social media, with 3% reporting a physical attack.

Nearly four in 10 changed their behavior to lower risks to their safety.

Similarly, nearly four in ten reported avoiding visible expressions of Jewishness in public, such as wearing a skullcap. Smaller percentages reported taking similar steps on campus or at work.

Other findings:

Nearly 90% of U.S. Jews and the same percentage of the country's total population believe antisemitism is a serious problem, up from 73% in 2016.

Of the Jews surveyed in 2022, 63% said that they see law enforcement as appro-



The Congregation Beth Israel synagogue is shown, Jan. 16, 2022, in Colleyville, Texas.

Associated Press

priately responsive when it comes to antisemitism, a substantial drop from 2019 when that number was 81%.

The survey collected data

from a nationally representative sample of 1,507 adults of Jewish religion or background.

It was conducted from Sept. 28 through Nov. 3. □

Cherokee Nation announces plans for \$18M treatment center

By SEAN MURPHY

Associated Press Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — As a child welfare specialist for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma more than a decade ago, Juli Skinner saw firsthand the impact of the opioid crisis on Cherokee families.

Parents who began using the powerful painkillers after a surgery or injury became hooked and were losing custody of their children, babies were being born addicted and young people who ended up in foster care were aging out of the system and becoming addicted themselves, resulting in a generational impact.

"We didn't know what hit us. We were just floundering," recalled Skinner, now the director of behavioral health for the Cherokee Nation, which is headquartered in Tahlequah in north-east Oklahoma.

Now, the nation's largest Native American tribe, with more than 440,000 enrolled citizens, plans to use a portion of its \$98 million in opioid settlement funds to construct a 50-bed, 17,000-square-foot treatment facility in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, where the tribe is headquartered. The facility, which tribal officials an-



Cherokee Nation Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr., speaks during a House Rules Committee hearing at the Capitol in Washington, Nov. 16, 2022.

nounced on Monday, will be completely operated by the tribe and provide no-cost treatment for Cherokee Nation citizens struggling with substance abuse. The \$18 million treatment center is part of \$73 million the tribe plans to spend building facilities across its reservation to address behavioral health needs, including drug treatment and prevention. Another \$5 million will go into a tribal endowment to help pay for Cherokees to go to college

and grad school to become therapists and medical professionals needed to staff the facilities.

"These will truly be drug treatment centers developed by Cherokees, for Cherokees," said Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin. "It's not a federal government-imposed facility."

"The symbolism is also important, which is we are paying for this over the next five years and making the opioid industry pay for

everything. There's a real sense of justice just making that statement." Native American tribes across the country settled with drug-maker Johnson & Johnson and the nation's largest drug distribution companies for \$590 million that will be divvied up among hundreds of tribal nations, but the Cherokee Nation negotiated its own separate settlement with drug manufacturers and distributors. One of the things Hoskin and other Cherokee Na-

tion officials are excited about is incorporating aspects of the tribe's culture into the recovery program. In addition to having peer recovery specialists who are Cherokees, the recovery curriculum includes traditional activities like bead making, talking circles and stickball.

"A person in recovery needs to know they're not alone," Hoskin said. "If you're Cherokee, there's a real cultural reason why you're not alone. We share traditions, even if those traditions in some families haven't been practiced in generations." For Jennifer Lasiter, a 38-year-old Cherokee Nation citizen who struggled for years with opioid addiction after she began taking hydrocodone for a back injury, having a connection with other Cherokee citizens at her workplace has been an important part of her recovery. "Just from working here at the Cherokee Nation, I believe that Cherokees band together and lift each other up," said Lasiter, a single mother of three children who works for the tribe's food distribution center and has been sober for five years. "As a tribe, we all feel connected in some way." □

Associated Press



Police vehicles surround a truck that was stopped and the driver arrested, Monday, Feb. 13, 2023, in New York.

Associated Press

By MICHAEL R. SISAK

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man driving a U-Haul truck struck and injured several people in New York City on Monday before police were

able to pin the careening vehicle against a building following a milelong pursuit through Brooklyn. Eyewitnesses said they saw pedestrians and e-bike riders sprawled on the ground

U-Haul hits, injures 8 pedestrians in NYC; 2 critical

after the truck drove through. At least eight people were hurt, including two people who were in critical condition, Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell said.

Sewell described the driver's actions as a "violent rampage through Brooklyn" but said there was no evidence of "terrorism involvement."

The truck sped through the Bay Ridge neighborhood of Brooklyn, hitting people on a sidewalk at one point, before police stopped it more than 3 miles (5 kilometers) away near the entrance to a tunnel leading from Brooklyn to Manhat-

tan. Sewell said a suspect was in custody and that police were investigating seven scenes. She released few other details.

A pastry shop owner, Pat Giura, said he didn't see the truck but saw the aftermath: a woman on the ground with her scooter or e-bike destroyed and another person hurt blocks away.

Aerial video from news helicopters showed the truck on a sidewalk, its path blocked by a police cruiser. Authorities were examining the truck to make sure it didn't contain explosives. The incident coincided

with the start of the death penalty phase in the trial of Sayfullo Saipov, an Islamic extremist who killed eight people in 2017 by mowing them down with a rented truck.

It was not clear whether the two events were related. □

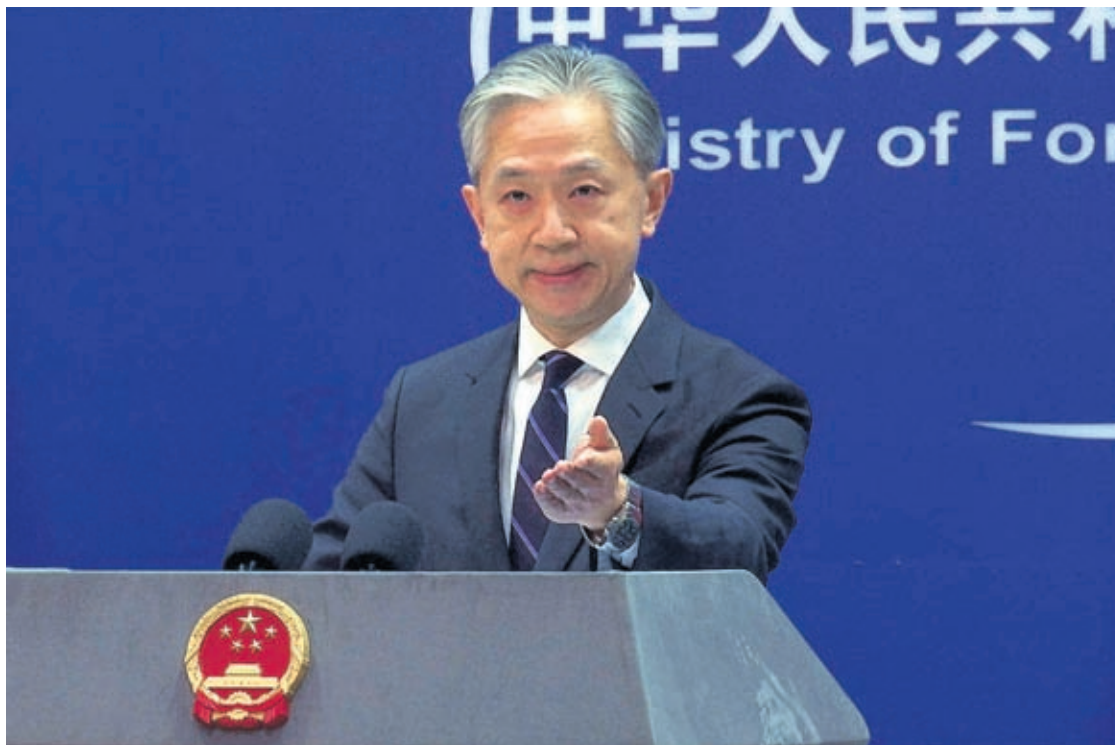


China says more than 10 U.S. balloons flew in its airspace

BEIJING (AP) — China on Monday said more than 10 U.S. high-altitude balloons have flown in its airspace during the past year without its permission, following Washington's accusation that Beijing operates a fleet of surveillance balloons around the world. The United States denied that it operates any surveillance balloons over China.

The Chinese allegation came after the U.S. shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon that had crossed from Alaska to South Carolina, sparking a new crisis in bilateral relations that have spiraled to their lowest level in decades. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin gave no details about the alleged U.S. balloons, how they had been dealt with or whether they had government or military links. "It is also common for U.S. balloons to illegally enter the airspace of other countries," Wang said at a daily briefing. "Since last year, U.S. high-altitude balloons have illegally flown over China's airspace more than 10 times without the approval of Chinese authorities."

Wang said the U.S. should "first reflect on itself and



In this image made from video, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin speaks during a media briefing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in Beijing, Monday, Feb. 13, 2023. Associated Press

change course, rather than smear and instigate a confrontation."

China says the balloon shot down by the U.S. was an unmanned airship made for meteorological research that had been blown off course. It has accused the U.S. of overreacting by shooting it down and threatened to take unspecified action in response.

In Washington, National Security Council spokesper-

son Adrienne Watson said Monday that any claim that the U.S. government operates surveillance balloons over China is false.

"It is China that has a high-altitude surveillance balloon program for intelligence collection, connected to the People's Liberation Army, that it has used to violate the sovereignty of the United States and over 40 countries across five continents," Watson said.

"This is the latest example of China scrambling to do damage control.

It has repeatedly and wrongly claimed the surveillance balloon it sent over the United States was a weather balloon and to this day has failed to offer any credible explanations for its intrusion into our airspace and the airspace of others."

Following the balloon incident, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken can-

celed a visit to Beijing that many had hoped would put the brakes on the sharp decline in relations over Taiwan, trade, human rights and threatening Chinese actions in the disputed South China Sea.

Wang said a Philippine coast guard vessel had trespassed into Chinese waters without permission on Feb. 6 and that Chinese coast guard vessels responded "professionally and with restraint." China claims virtually all of the strategic waterway and has been steadily building up its maritime forces and island outposts.

"China and the Philippines are maintaining communication through diplomatic channels in this regard," Wang said.

China's Defense Ministry did not immediately respond to a question about the incident.

Adding to tensions, a U.S. fighter jet shot down an "unidentified object" over Lake Huron on Sunday on orders from President Joe Biden. It was the fourth such downing in eight days in an extraordinary chain of events over U.S. airspace that Pentagon officials believe has no peacetime precedent. □

Palestinian medics: Israeli army kills man in West Bank raid

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Palestinian man was killed and at least seven others were wounded Monday during a shootout with Israeli troops in the occupied West Bank city of Nablus, Palestinian officials said.

Late on Monday, Israeli police said an officer was critically wounded by friendly fire while trying to stop a Palestinian stabbing attack in east Jerusalem.

The incidents were the latest violence in a surge of Israeli-Palestinian fighting that began last spring and shows no signs of slowing. The Israeli military said it carried out raids across the West Bank overnight, and that troops came under fire during the arrest of two

men suspected of killing an Israeli soldier in October. The army said the two wanted men were injured in the shootout and arrested.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said Amir Bustami, 21, was killed in the Israeli army raid. It was not clear if he had been involved in the shootout. In east Jerusalem, meanwhile, Israeli police said a young teenage Palestinian boy pulled out a knife and stabbed an officer during a routine inspection at a military checkpoint. Police said a security guard opened fire, inadvertently shooting the officer and critically injuring him. The boy was arrested. Tensions have mounted for

months as Israel has conducted nightly arrest raids in the West Bank, which were prompted by a spate of Palestinian attacks on Israelis last spring. Some 30 people were killed in Israel by Palestinians in 2022, and at least 11 others in attacks so far in 2023.

Nearly 150 Palestinians were killed last year in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, making it the deadliest year in those areas since 2004, according to figures by the Israeli rights group B'Tselem. At least 46 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli troops since the start of this year.

Israel says that most of those killed have been militants but others including

youths protesting the incursions and other people not involved in confrontations have also been killed.

Israel says the military raids are meant to dismantle mil-

itant networks and thwart future attacks while the Palestinians view them as further entrenchment of Israel's open-ended, 55-year occupation. □



Israeli border police officers gather at the scene of an alleged stabbing attack at Shuafat crossing in east Jerusalem, Monday, Feb. 13, 2023.

Associated Press

Portugal church sex abuse study: Victims may number 4,800

By **BARRY HATTON**

Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) —

More than 4,800 individuals may have been victims of child sex abuse in the Portuguese Catholic Church and 512 alleged victims have already come forward with their stories, an expert panel looking into historic abuse in the church said Monday.

Senior Portuguese church officials had previously claimed that only a handful of cases had occurred. Senior clergymen sat in the front row of the auditorium where panel members read out some of the harrowing accounts of alleged abuse included in their final report. There were vivid and shocking descriptions. The Independent Committee for the Study of Child Abuse in the Catholic Church, set up by Portuguese bishops just over a year ago, looked into alleged cases from 1950 onward. Portuguese bishops are due to discuss the report at an extraordinary meeting on March 3.

The statute of limitations



The head of the Portuguese Bishops Conference, Bishop Jose Ornelas, centre, arrives for a news conference to comment on the report released hours earlier by the Independent Committee for the Study of Child Abuse in the Catholic Church, set up by Portuguese bishops, in Lisbon, Monday, Feb. 13, 2023.

has expired on most of the alleged cases. Only 25 allegations were passed to prosecutors, the panel said. The report, criticized by some as long overdue, came four years after Pope Francis gathered church leaders from around the world at the Vatican to address the sex abuse crisis in the church.

That meeting was held more than 30 years after the scandal first erupted in Ireland and Australia and 20 years after it hit the United States.

Bishops and other Catholic superiors in many parts of

Europe at the time continued to deny that clergy sex abuse existed or insisted on giving little weight to the problem.

The head of the Portuguese Bishops Conference, Bishop José Ornelas, asked the victims for forgiveness and apologized for the church

Associated Press

having failed to grasp the scale of the problem.

Child sex abuse is a "heinous crime," Ornelas said in a statement he read out later Monday, adding: "It is an open wound which pains and embarrasses us." The panel regretted that the Vatican had taken so long to grant access to church archives. Permission came only in October, giving the panel just three months to go through written evidence of abuse.

Pedro Strecht, a psychiatrist who headed the panel in Portugal, said it estimates the true number of victims during the period under study as being at least at 4,815. That extrapolation was made on potential other victims mentioned by those victims who came forward. The panel is not publishing the names of the victims, the identities of the alleged abusers, or the places the abuses allegedly happened. However, it is to send to bishops by the end of the month a list of alleged abusers who are still active in the church. □

Colombian government, rebels resume peace talks in Mexico

By **MARÍA VERZA and AS-TRID SUÁREZ**

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Colombia's government and its largest remaining rebel group met in Mexico City on Monday to resume peace talks aimed at resolving a conflict dating back to the 1960s.

It was the second round talks with the communist-inspired National Liberation Army, known as ELN, in negotiations launched in November shortly after President Gustavo Petro was elected as Colombia's first leftist president. The first three weeks of talks in Venezuela's capital yielded only modest results.

Negotiations between the sides had been suspended in 2019 following a rebel attack on a police academy in Bogotá that killed 23 people.

The Colombian government representative, José Ottó Patiño, said the latest round should produce "permanent solutions ... not temporary truces."

Pablo Beltrán, the rebels' chief negotiator, said the talks were aimed at a "tem-

porary, nationwide ceasefire" and that any agreement should include "an alternative anti-drug policy that is no longer based on repression and war."

The ELN, founded in 1964 and present in about 200 Colombian townships, is

based in areas where cocaine production is widespread.

Petro has said that peace talks with the ELN are a cornerstone of his plan to bring "total peace" to the nation of 50 million people, where some rural areas are still under the grip of drug gangs and rebel groups despite a 2016 peace deal with the larger Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

The ELN has around 4,000 troops in Colombia and neighboring Venezuela, where human rights groups have reported the group runs drug trafficking routes and illegal gold mines.

The rebel group was founded by intellectuals inspired by the Cuban revolution and was often smaller than the FARC. But in recent years, the ELN has become more influential in

rural pockets of Colombia that were abandoned by the FARC rebels after they made peace with the government.

The ELN leadership is concerned by Petro's plan for "total peace" with drug cartels and rebels, saying the two groups should not be treated equally.

Petro has said his administration would not negotiate with drug traffickers, and they would have to submit to justice.

Andrés Macías, who studies armed conflicts at Colombia's Externado University, said the ELN had political aims "at least when it was founded," and is wary of being thrown into the same basket as powerful cartels like Colombia's Gulf Clan.

Mexico, Norway, Venezuela, Chile and Cuba are acting as guarantor nations in the ELN peace talks. □



Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Relations Marcelo Ebrard, center, stands with delegations from the Colombian government and Colombia's ELN guerrilla group after the opening ceremony of the second round of talks in Mexico City, Monday, Feb. 13, 2023.

Associated Press

Agreement signed with Colombia's Grupo Exito Super Do It Center will offer more products at competitive prices



ORANJESTAD - Do It Center is ready for a new challenge that will offer its clients and the Aruban community in general a variety of products. Exito and Do It Center Aruba signed an agreement for a strategic alliance!

Frans Ponson, manager of Do It Center, said that this agreement is something very big and certainly something new for Do It Center. Everyone can remember that the company started as General Store, and was a small company. However, the Ponson family continued investing throughout the years and reached a big agreement with Do It Center.

Afterwards they became the first Super Do It Center, seeing that food products are now available at the store.

Now, they have signed with a big group, Exito from Colombia, which forms part of the Casino group from France. This agreement will allow Do It Center access to different products from around Latin America at a more affordable price. Frans Ponson also commented that they will have direct contact with the factory in case there is the desire to create a specific product for Aruba. This means that Super Do It Center has reached a bigger position offering more options and possibilities for the people of Aruba.



Laurent Guy Zecri, Corporate Manager of Strategic Alliances of Grupo Exito, explained that the company is a Colombian enterprise with French financing, and currently they are the biggest retail group in Colombia, employing about 37,000 people. For Aruba, this agreement is important because it will give us access to a new market, seeing that Aruba purchases from the United States or Europe. The production capacity is a lot cheaper and this might provide relief from inflation.

At Exito you can find everything you need, from food, clothes, alcohol, technology, beauty products and pet supplies. Aside from this, you can also find products for your home.

Exito was founded in 1949 and today it manages 2606 stores all around Colom-

bia, Uruguay and Argentina. They employ more than 40,000 workers.

Eric Ponson started his commercial history in Aruba many years ago as a worker at General Store, a company that exists for more than 90 years. At one point he purchased the business of electronic products. In 2010, he opened the first Do It Center in Camacuri, known as an international brand of a Hardware Store, while in 2017 Super Do It Center was created, the first in the world, combining a hardware store and a supermarket. The store, which nowadays employs over 200 workers, will continue with the same concept, only adding the Exito lines of product in the variety offered to customers. The Ponson Family is convinced that this way they can offer more and better products at a more competitive price. □

Aruba's Tourism Association introducing AHATA Impact Award

ORANJESTAD – President and CEO of AHATA, Tisa La-Sorte proudly announced to members of the Aruba Hotel and Industry Association that in 2023, they are introducing the AHATA Impact Award. The goal of this award program is to give recognition to the efforts of responsible companies, members of AHATA, that are investing in and improving our community.



There will be awards separated in four key sustainability pillars:

- Charity (financial donations or volunteering);
- Cultural promotion;
- Protection of our environment;
- Contribution to a high quality of life for employees.

AHATA collaborated with five representatives of well-respected organizations in Aruba to develop the requirements for the awards and the criteria for evaluation. The same five people will serve as a judge team to evaluate the applications and choose four winners.

The panel of judges will be: Daniel Tecklenborg, Director of CEDE Aruba; Franciele Laclé; Sustainable Development Consultant; Ray-Ann Hernandez, Director of UNOCA; Jan Noordzij, manager of



Advance Human Resources Services;

Rosabelle Illes, PHD, psychologist and assistant professor at the University of Aruba.

During a special event in June the four winners of the AHATA Impact Award 2023

will be chosen.

With this new award program, AHATA is providing support to sustainable enterprises and hopes to inspire more businesses to invest in the sustainability pillars which ensure a good future for our island. □

LOCAL



Camping season 2023 announced

Oranjestad - In connection with the upcoming camping season during spring break, the Chief of Police, Mr. Ramon Arnhem, urges all campers to be aware of the conditions set for the camping permit.

Camping starts on Sunday, April 2, 2023, from noon, and the last day is April 16, 2023. It is only permitted to set up tents and trailers on the beach during these days. The Police will remove any tents or trailers placed on the beach before the starting day and time, at the owner's expense. After April 16, 2023, campers must remove all camping-related objects should be removed from the beach. Failing to remove these will also result in their removal at the permit holder's expense. The police urge everyone to keep all beaches clean. Dispose of all trash in trash containers or trash bags.

Deadline for a camping permit

The last day to apply for a camping permit is March 15, 2023, at 4:30 pm. You can submit permit applications during weekdays from

8:00 am to 11:30 am and from 1:00 pm to 04:30 pm.

Additional conditions are now applicable:

BBQ on the beach (sand) is not allowed under any circumstance. BBQ is only allowed in designated areas and when using a gas BBQ Pit. Charcoal is not permitted at all.

Tents and trailers used for camping should be in good condition and placed at least 10 meters from the water's edge and 5 meters from the road's side. Not complying with these guides will also result in the removal of these tents or trailers by the Police. Camping sites can under no circumstance be reserved.

You are allowed to only place a tent, trailer, and objects in the location designated by Government officials.

Tents/trailers should have proper first aid resources (First Aid kit)

Obscene objects or posters are prohibited.

Campers should always comply with all the conditions set in the camping permit.

Motor vehicles, bicycles,



horses, or any cart is prohibited on the beach.

Campfires are prohibited on the beach

The sale of food, refreshments, cocktails, or any other item on the beach without the proper permit is prohibited.

You can only play music in a tent or trailer during the weekdays until 10:00 pm and on the weekend until midnight as long as it does not cause nuisances to neighbor campers.

It is not allowed to trim or

chop any tree without a permit.

Boating or setting anchors in designated swimming zones is not allowed. It is prohibited to tie boats to buoys meant for ships.

It is not allowed to use pallets and cardboard on the beach. Failing to comply with this rule will result in the removal by the authorities. Camping seasonThe beach or palm trees are not allowed to be used as a toilet.

Horses and dogs are not allowed on the beach.

Beach huts are not allowed to be used for camping and should remain available for beachgoers.

All beaches should be kept clean. Glass bottles and or glass shrapnels must be removed immediately from the sand and not discarded in the ocean. It also applies to all trash.

You cannot transfer the camping permit to a third party.

The permit holder should have the permit visible to the police in the tent/trailer.

The permit holder's right to use the camping site is exclusive during the camping period. Before the camping date, no area can be reserved/marked or cordoned off, etc.

The permit holder is solely responsible for any harm caused to others by his/her trailer/tent or any other object.

The permit holder must strictly follow police directives in the interest of public order, the safety of people, morality, and property.

Failing to comply with any of these conditions is considered similar to camping without a permit. The camping permit will be immediately revoked and may result in a fine.

The deadline for the camping permit application is March 15, 2023, at 4:30 pm. Comply with all the rules and regulations and have great camping. Be aware that the police will be actively checking all beaches and camping sites during the camping season. □



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January 2023 started with 98.000 tourists

ORANJESTAD – The Minister of Tourism and Public Health, Mr. Dangui Oduber announces that 2023 started successfully.

In January 2023, Aruba's tourism figures surpassed January 2019, a record year for tourism. In January 2023, Aruba registered a recovery of 105% compared to 2019.

Aruba's most important market was the US market, with a recovery of 113% in January 2023 compared to January 2019, with 98.942 tourists compared to 93.953 in January 2019. It entails an increase of 4989 tourists. Aruba continues to be a popular destination. Therefore it is essential to invest in the Aruban product to stay competitive.

Aruba ranks as the second country with the fastest tourism recovery. It shows Aruba's resilience, tourism policy, and excellent cooperation in the tourism sector with Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA), Aruba Ports Authority (APA), Aruba Airport Authority (AAA), Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association (AHATA) and Aruba Time Share Association (ATSA) to make it possible. □



Prime Minister meets with statistical agencies CBS of Aruba and ECLAC of the United Nations

ORANJESTAD – On February 10, Prime Minister Evelyn Wever-Croes met with the representatives of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations agency that handles Statistical Systems

The data and information are not from individual persons but are categorized groups, for example, the number of women per age group, young men per age group, and the number of births taking place. The last data helps to determine




the number of necessary schools in the future. The government bases many of its policy decisions on data. However, not all data is always available. CBS together with the U.N. agency, but also in the framework of the landpakket with the Netherlands, received financing for this project. Both institutes informed the Prime Minister

of the developments and work activities to realize and finalize this project.


Besides the statistical systems development, the needed laws, for example, to protect the surveys or censuses participants by avoiding misuse, will be amended. Because when you have digitalized statistics, there may be a danger of data breach, namely unauthorized or illegal viewing not intended for them. They will draft the law this year and complete it at the end of the year. It will protect the centralized data of individuals in his system. □



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Today Is Going To Be A Good Day

Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do **BEYOND** the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by

the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whip-tail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just



some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.arubanationalpark.org

The Lighthouse

No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project

finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light. www.arubalighthouse.com will give you more information.

Kayak in the Mangroves
Mangel Halto at Savaneta

is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout -as it might get a little windy and rough-, you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. Its fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. There are several companies that offer kayak tours, we had good experience with The Shack Kayak Tours Aruba, find them on Facebook. □

Aruba enjoyed a beautiful Lighting Parade for Carnaval 69

ORANJESTAD – Last Saturday, after 8pm, and after two years of absence, Aruba finally enjoyed its Grand Lighting Parade for Carnaval 69 in Oranjestad, with the participation of six groups and their accompanying bands to create a festive atmosphere

From Aruba Entertainment Center, passing through the Milo Croes avenue, Vondellaan, the Las Americas roundabout, L.G. Smith Boulevard and arriving at a roundabout, the six participating groups, Royal Carnival Group, TOB Carnival Group, Champagne Carnival Group, Empire Carnival Group, Los Laga Bai Carnival Group and Infinity Carnival Group proudly showed off their creativity with their different costumes full of color and light, to infuse the streets of Aruba with the atmosphere of Carnaval. □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

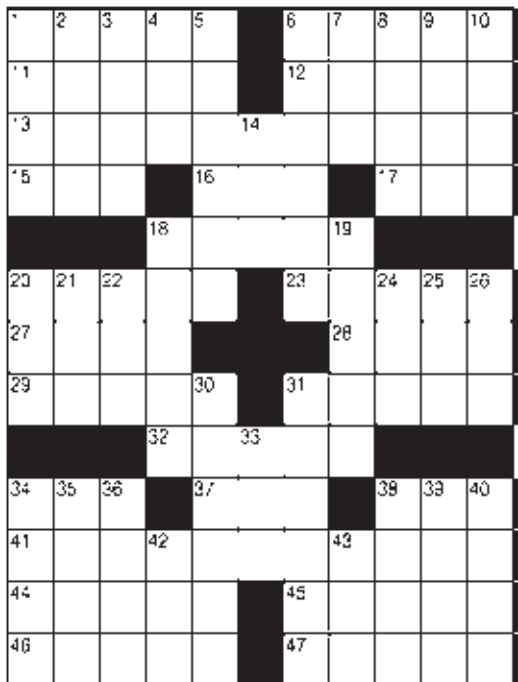
- 1 Like some notebook paper
- 6 Taking to court
- 11 Date on
- 12 Passion
- 13 Barbra Streisand hit
- 15 Compass dir.
- 16 Pen fill
- 17 Fall behind
- 18 Jeans material
- 20 Valentine's Day gift
- 23 Frisco player
- 27 Opera piece
- 28 Cairo's river
- 29 Polite chaps
- 31 Amorous archer
- 32 Corridors
- 34 Cash dispenser
- 37 Golf peg
- 38 Desire
- 41 Beyoncé hit
- 44 Microwave feature
- 45 Gives over
- 46 Stretches over
- 47 Valentine symbol

DOWN

- 1 Statutes
- 2 Wedding vows
- 3 Alaskan city
- 4 Memo-rable time
- 5 Disavows
- 6 Registered
- 7 Online address
- 8 Revered one
- 9 Flaring star
- 10 Golfer Norman
- 14 Tourist stop
- 18 Ominous tarot card
- 19 Less
- 20 Cloth scrap
- 21 Metal source
- 22 Lust, e.g.
- 24 Tiny taste
- 25 Yale rooster
- 26 Valentine color
- 30 Nymph chasers
- 31 Hold tightly
- 33 Floral garland
- 34 Play parts
- 35 Journey
- 36 Baby's call
- 38 Luke's teacher
- 39 At any time
- 40 Egg setting
- 42 Buddhism branch
- 43 Spike of film



Yesterday's answer



2-14

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-14

CRYPTOQUOTE

O B K K I Y P O W J R J P U O Q Z K

T N V J I X R O Z Q O Z I N Q Z K Y

N Z Y J Z Y K Z O P P N W N Z B

— R O K Y E M

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: TO LOVE AND BE LOVED IS TO FEEL THE SUN FROM BOTH SIDES.

— DAVID VISCOTT



In this June 15, 2018, file photo, cash is fanned out from a wallet in North Andover, Mass.

Associated Press

Kimberly Palmer: Family budgeting tips that actually work

By KIMBERLY PALMER of NerdWallet

When Tom Snyder coaches people in his church about how to budget, he starts by encouraging them to track their spending.

"If we don't track, we don't know when to stop spending," he says. The retired engineer and financial coach in Grand Rapids, Michigan, adds that it's easy to be bumped off track by irregular costs, such as birthday gifts or vacations.

Successful family budgeting is all about staying flexible so you can handle those irregular costs as well as unexpected challenges, including sky-high grocery store prices or rising interest rates. Financial experts like Snyder say that by using creative methods to dial in a budget and trim costs in some areas, you can often still find ways to spend on what is most important to you.

FOLLOW YOUR RHYTHM, NOT RULES

Severine Bryan, a personal finance educator and coach based in Atlanta, says a budget needs to stay flexible and constantly adjust to challenges. One of the biggest mistakes people make, she adds, is thinking they have to follow a set approach, such as the 50/30/20 budget.

Bryan, who holds a doctorate in business administration, likes to track her spending with spreadsheets, but her college-age daughter prefers a more creative approach with visuals and graphs. They each use their preferred method, then communicate about spending when necessary. "It has to be a method you enjoy so you want to use it all the time," she says.

FACTOR IN VARIABLE EXPENSES

"The default view of budgeting is annual, but I think that can be frustrating because it's really hard to have a perspective on your entire year in one sitting," says Charlie Bolognino, a certified financial planner in Plymouth, Minnesota. Instead, he suggests starting with a month-by-month approach, then taking time to layer in the less predictable costs such as holiday expenses. □



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At 82, Dionne Warwick staying busy with youth musical, more

By **CURT ANDERSON**

Associated Press

CLEARWATER, Fla. (AP) —

With a stunning musical career already spanning decades, Dionne Warwick couldn't be blamed for slowing down a bit at age 82. That is nowhere near happening.

The Grammy-winning, multimillion-selling singer has a soon-to-be released duet with Dolly Parton and a new biographical documentary now streaming on HBO Max. That's not all.

Her latest project with music producer son Damon Elliott and others is an upcoming 50-city live touring show called "Hits! The Musical" with performers ranging in age from 10 to 22.

This week at a rehearsal space in Clearwater, Florida, it was time to hear the kids sing and dance, the first chance for Warwick to see the "Hits!" revue in person. It's set to begin performances Feb. 23 in Asheville, North Carolina, and end May 8 in San Francisco.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Warwick said she did not hesitate when the opportunity arose to be an executive producer of the show.

"Anything that deals with children is an automatic



Singer and executive producer Dionne Warwick appears during a rehearsal for the touring show "Hits! The Musical" Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2023, in Clearwater, Fla.

Associated Press

yes for me," Warwick said. "These babies are amazing. They've proven what music can do, bring joy, happiness, inspiration, ability just life, you know?"

Warwick said she had "an amazing experience" after watching the group run through high-energy medleys of everything from Ricky Martin's "Livin' La Vida Loca" to "Where Is The Love?" by the Black-Eyed Peas to a mashup of Adele's "Rolling In The Deep" and "Uptown Funk"

by Bruno Mars. One of the youthful 29-member cast, 15-year-old Matthew Jost, said he's thrilled to be part of the show even after playing guitarist Zack in "School of Rock" on Broadway. The show runs through key eras of music over three acts, from rock to pop to hip-hop. "It's just music that means a lot to me. For this year, we're all over the place," Jost said, adding that he hopes the audience "just gets that we're kids, we're here, and music

brings people together."

Much credit goes to Warwick's son, Damon Elliott, who was nominated this year for an Academy Award along with songwriter Diane Warren for the song "Applause" from the film "Tell It Like A Woman." The pair also teamed up on a song called "Gonna Be You" in the new "80 For Brady" movie. "Mom and I, we don't take on anything, we don't endorse pretty much anything," Elliott said in an interview about the

"Hits!" show. "But when it involves kids, as long as they are truly up to par and they work hard and bring that energy, I'll be behind it."

Another executive producer is Thaddeus M. Bullard, a former college and professional football player best known as WWE wrestling star Titus O'Neil, and show CEO Bob Gries, a Tampa financier who formerly owned two Florida Arena League football teams.

Warwick's rehearsal show Wednesday capped a week in which she attended the Grammy Awards, performed at a MusiCares dinner honoring Motown greats Berry Gordy and Smokey Robinson and then flew to Nashville, Tennessee to shoot a video with Parton for their new tune.

That song, "Peace Like A River," is set for release Feb. 24. Warwick said she has known Parton for years but they've never recorded together.

"She sent me a song and decided she wanted me to sing with her," Warwick said, noting she plans to record a gospel/inspirational album herself in the coming months. "It's so timely. This song fits completely inside what I'm getting ready to do." □



This cover image released by Nonesuch Records shows "Your Mother Should Know: Brad Mehldau Plays The Beatles," by Brad Mehldau.

Associated Press

Review: Jazz pianist Brad Mehldau and Beatles come together

By **STEVEN WINE**

Associated Press

Brad Mehldau and the Beatles make a captivating jazz combo.

It helps that Mehldau's piano stylings have a range worthy of the Fab Four. He bridges the divides between Debussy and Professor Longhair, between rock and Rachmaninoff, his rhythms tipsy at times as he evokes saloon music and comic opera.

And that's just on a 6½-minute rendition of "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," one of the 11 tunes on his new live solo album,

"Your Mother Should Know: Brad Mehldau Plays The

Beatles." The album pairs jazz's most lyrical living pianist with songwriting masters of melody, and Mehldau finds fresh radiance in the familiar tunes by exploring their elasticity, which is considerable.

These performances show how Beatles songs invite improvisation thanks to their lilt, sturdy construction and sophisticated chord changes. Plus, as Mehldau observes in his liner notes, they swing.

He plays "Your Mother Should Know" as jaunty, sunny ragtime, and "She Said She Said" calls to mind film noir. A slow, gentle account of "Here, There and

Everywhere" twinkles with discordant splashes and hints of Thelonious Monk, while "I Saw Her Standing There" is rollicking boogie-woogie that would be at home in the French Quarter.

Mehldau has long excelled as an interpreter of rock, the Beatles included, and to show the breadth of their influence, he closes the album with David Bowie's "Life on Mars?" Mehldau's version seesaws from Broadway buildups to blues reflections before a closing symphonic flourish, which provides the exclamation mark the album deserves. □

Lack of Winter Olympic bids may lead to rotating fixed hosts

By **ANDREW DAMPF**

AP Sports Writer

MERIBEL, France (AP) —

Considering the dearth of candidates to stage the Winter Olympics amid spiralling venue costs, the IOC may have to resort to lining up a list of fixed, rotating hosts.

A highly theoretical list could include Salt Lake City and Vancouver in North America, Pyeongchang in Asia and places like Switzerland, Italy and Scandinavia in Europe.

"There are talks. It is a challenge with climate change and also infrastructure to be able to find venues for the Winter Olympics," retired Olympic skiing champion Lindsey Vonn said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

Vonn is on the bid committee for Salt Lake City's candidacy for the 2030 or 2034 Games.

Most of the rotating hosts would have hosted the Olympics previously, or have most of the venues already built.

"A rotating venue option is on the table in which certain altitude standards would be in place and it would have to have mostly



Italy's Christof Innerhofer is airborne during an alpine ski, men's World Championships downhill training, in Courchevel, France, Friday, Feb. 10, 2023.

Associated Press

pre-existing structures and it would limit the cost for the venues and it would limit the chances of climate change affecting the competitions in a negative way," Vonn said.

"I know that's been discussed. How early that will happen, I don't know, but I don't think it would happen before 2034."

Sweden's Olympic lead-

ers announced last week that they are weighing up whether to bid for 2030 while the International Olympic Committee has delayed the process to search for more contenders.

Sapporo, Japan was considered the favorite for 2030 before an ongoing bid-rigging scandal related to the Summer Olympics in To-

kyo held in 2021. Salt Lake City is the only other known bidder that might consider taking 2030, though officials have said they favor a bid for 2034.

If a Stockholm-centered bid does go ahead, it currently seems sure to win without opposition and get the IOC out of a hole less than seven years before the Games open.

After last year's Beijing Games were held almost entirely on artificial snow, the Milan-Cortina Games in 2026 will be held across a wide swath of northern Italy.

For 2022, Beijing beat Almaty, Kazakhstan — the only other candidate — for hosting rights after several other bids were scrapped by public referendums.

"There's a lot of events that are really difficult to run," said Canadian skier James Crawford, who won the super-G last week at the world championships. "I think there's a lot of places that can host the Winter Olympics ... but it's definitely hard for us when there's so few that want to."

Alexis Pinturault, the French skier who won gold in combined and bronze in super-G at the worlds, grew up utilizing the facilities built for the 1992 Albertville Games. "I also (tried) ski jumping here," he said in his hometown of Courchevel, where the ski jump is adjacent to the downhill course. "I also did cross country skiing. That was the thing with the Courchevel ski club: when you are young you can try many different sports." □

Warriors guard Payton II to be sidelined at least a month

By **JANIE McCAULEY**

AP Sports Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) —

Newly acquired Golden State guard Gary Payton II will be out for at least a month as he fully recovers from offseason surgery for a core muscle injury, and Warriors general manager Bob Myers is awaiting a decision from the NBA on whether the Trail Blazers withheld anything on Payton's health before trading him. "What do I want? Whatever the NBA says is fair, just whatever that is," Myers said Monday of receiving any potential compensation from Portland. "I just want a fair result. I don't know, whatever it takes it takes, I don't know how long."

Myers is hopeful the defensive guard could return

before the playoffs. Payton is listed on the injury report with right adductor soreness, stemming from the abdominal area and there were no further details on whether that means the high-flying Payton's right leg is also compromised.

"Gary's going to be out. We're going to evaluate him in a month. It is our determination he's not ready to play right now," Myers said. Myers wouldn't address any issues the Warriors had with how Portland handled the trade or whether they failed to share any details on Payton's health, citing legal constraints and medical privacy. Golden State did bring concerns about the process to the league before deciding Sunday to go through with the four-team swap that

sent center James Wiseman to the Pistons. Myers said the team evaluated all options, including perhaps rescinding the trade altogether.

"We had the time we had to make a decision, so it was just more thinking about it," Myers said. "Probably by Saturday night we had a sense of the direction we going in."

While the defending champions were hopeful of having Payton play immediately, Myers still believes in the move over the long haul. Payton signed a \$28 million, three-year contract with the Trail Blazers.

"We still think it's helpful. We just have to wait till he gets healthy," Myers said. The 30-year-old Payton played against Golden State in a win Wednesday



Portland Trail Blazers guard Gary Payton II wears a towel over his head during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Chicago Bulls, Saturday, Feb. 4, 2023, in Chicago.

Associated Press

night at Portland before rejoining his former team ahead of the trade deadline a day later. Payton is averaging 4.1 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.5 assists over 15 games.

"As far as Gary what he does for us I think you all know, you've seen what he does for us," Myers said. "We're trying to help give this team a boost, near term, long term." □

Bruins' Ullmark is NHL's biggest goalie surprise this season

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
AP Hockey Writer

Linus Ullmark moved to the Boston area in the summer of 2021 with his wife, their two young children and their dogs after signing with the Bruins. Settling in with his new team didn't happen right away. Fresh off signing a \$20 million, four-year contract, Ullmark shared the net with rookie Jeremy Swayman and then, briefly, with Tuukka Rask, the organization cornerstone who was trying to come back from hip surgery. Ullmark allowed eight goals in two playoff games before losing the starting job to Swayman and went into an off-season of change unsure what his role would be.

Turns out, it's a starring one as the best goaltender in



Boston Bruins' Linus Ullmark (35) and teammates celebrate after defeating the Pittsburgh Penguins in the NHL Winter Classic hockey game, Monday, Jan. 2, 2023, at Fenway Park in Boston.

Associated Press

the NHL. Ullmark leads the league in wins, save per-

centage and goals-against average, and is one of the biggest reasons the Bruins are atop the standings and on pace for the best regular season in NHL history. Along with fellow All-Stars Stuart Skinner and Logan Thompson, who respectively have the Edmonton Oilers and Vegas Golden Knights on track to make the playoffs, Ullmark tops the list of the biggest goalie surprises of the season.

"He's been standing on the head," Bruins leading scorer and fellow MVP candidate David Pastrnak said. "He's been playing unbelievable. It's just fun to watch him, honestly, this year. He's playing confident. He's big. He's very confident in the net, and he's having a special year." Ullmark credits being more comfortable in his new surroundings and it has shown in his play: He already has tied his career high with 26 victories, his .937 save percentage is more than 10 points higher than the next-closest competitor and his 1.90 GAA would be the lowest by a goalie with 40 or more games since Hall of Famer Martin Brodeur in 1997-98. The 29-year-old Swede has been thinking a lot about what changed in his game and finds it hard to pinpoint. Feeling more "at home" in Boston is one piece of many. "I just think it's just small pieces here

and there that are just falling into place," Ullmark said. "We have a great team, as well, and it goes kind of hand in hand with my performance and also with Sway's performance. It's not just a one-man show. It's a team effort."

The Bruins lead Eastern Conference behind Pastrnak's 38 goals, captain Patrice Bergeron's two-way dominance at the age of 37 and the coaching of newcomer Jim Montgomery. But Bruce Cassidy, who was fired after coaching Boston to six playoff appearances, called Ullmark's emergence "the big one" when asked about his former team's consistency. "He finished really well last year, and he's carried that into this year," Cassidy said. "Now you're creating competition with Swayman at that position. I think that's a great thing for Boston."

Cassidy, now behind the bench for the Golden Knights, has had Thompson on top of his game after Vegas learned late in the offseason Robin Lehner would be out for the season rehabbing from hip surgery. Thrust into a leading role by injuries last season, Thompson won 20 of his first 35 starts this season before himself getting sidelined last week. Before that, the undrafted late bloomer earned All-Star honors and put himself in the conversation for the Calder Trophy as rookie of the year.

"There was a lot of times when I was really close to just quitting and giving up," Thompson said. "That competitiveness in me never went away. That's the biggest thing is never stop working hard at what you want."

Oilers coach Jay Woodcroft saw similar tendencies in Skinner when they were together in the minors last year. Edmonton's American Hockey League affiliate in Bakersfield, California, was desperate for a starter one night; Skinner rushed to the rink after travel issues, getting there 5 minutes before warmups and then backstopping a win. □

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